

Promising Practice: Working with Individuals with a Criminal Background
New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services
Office of Minority Health and Refugee Affairs
Health Profession Opportunity Project (HPOP)

The New Hampshire Health Profession Opportunity Project (HPOP), a Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance, has made an affirmative decision to accept individuals into the program who have criminal records. This practice is informed by employer feedback; a number of employers that work closely with the program through its business advisory councils have indicated that having a record will not automatically rule out an applicant for employment. Additionally, the program has made a philosophical decision that, to the extent possible, it will contribute to providing a second chance to otherwise marginalized individuals.

At the same time, HPOP is selective about these admissions and considers such variables as what the offense was, how long ago it occurred, and what the applicant has done since then to change his or her life and to make amends where appropriate. Program staff also listens carefully to how the applicant talks about the offense and the impact it had on the applicant's life and the lives of those around him or her, including the victim, if there was one. Especially, they listen for indications that the individual recognizes the error of his or her ways and takes responsibility for the act in question. Because staff must also assess employability within healthcare, an individual's healthcare career goal is a factor in the decision to admit to HPOP as well. Staff are frank with these applicants that their process may present more challenges than most and that they must be prepared, with the program's support and partnership, to do the extra work required to increase their marketability.

Individuals are referred to job developers at different times in the process of training and career preparation, but when a participant has a record, contact is often made sooner in the process. That gives the job developer more time for the work to prepare for job search, to maximize potential hires.

New Hampshire HPOP job developers implement a process of coaching strategies and portfolio development in addition to routine job search skills training. Some of these more specialized steps and strategies include the following:

1. Participants respond to routine job developer intake questions but are also questioned about criminal history and asked to describe criminal events in their own words.
2. Job developers and participants begin working together to assemble a professional portfolio.
 - Create a strengths-based résumé to help participants rebuild confidence to approach former employers and work initially within existing networks.

- If participant is not already engaging in relevant volunteer work, job developer will suggest doing so.
 - Participant is encouraged to write a cover letter to be used to apply for paid employment, volunteer work, and internships.
 - Participant is encouraged to get references and letters of recommendation from former or present employers, colleagues, church members, volunteer coordinators, sponsors/12-step members, or caseworkers. Among other things, this process can help rebuild contacts that may be essential to secure employment.
3. Participants practice interview skills, taking into account the challenges of criminal background discussion with hiring managers.
- Participant writes a letter of explanation for job interviews where s/he acknowledges not only responsibility for criminal actions but also positive changes that have occurred since that event.
 - The hope is that the message of participant's marketability, ability, and skills has been reinforced through positive volunteer experience, recommendations, positive references, and continual review of interviewing skills.
 - It is critical that the participant develop self-confidence that is apparent when disclosing criminal history to employers. Self-confidence is built on a process of asset development and recognition of self-value over time that mitigates the shame and diminished self-worth that is often apparent in individuals with criminal histories.
4. Participants maintain enthusiasm, encouraged by staff to follow these steps:
- Break down large goals into smaller, more immediate goals in order to experience success.
 - Attend discipline-related training opportunities and continuing education when possible.
 - Continue practicing interview skills.
 - Learn to write a thank-you letter post-interview.

**Promising Practice: Build and Coordinate Infrastructure
to Support Youth "Aging Out" of Foster Care
New Hampshire Office of Minority Health and Refugee Affairs (OMHRA)
Health Profession Opportunity Project (HPOP)**

In February 2012, New Hampshire issued an RFP for Capacity Building projects in four topic areas and the best practice highlighted here is a result of work done in one of the four areas. Capacity building and infrastructure development are intended to be system-level interventions to support the work at an individual level in the recruitment, training

and employing of participants served by HPOP. They are also intended to do the following:

- Support sustained practice changes in education and training programs and in healthcare settings that endorse inclusion and diversity,
- Support economic development activities in support of HPOP graduate employment,
- Engage, recruit and support youth within child protection and juvenile justice systems who will or have "aged out" of State care to seek post-secondary education in healthcare.

Youth in this situation are a target population for NH's HPOP because they face serious challenges to their future success. Their challenges include significant barriers to accessing and achieving post-secondary education. The social and financial costs of failing to provide access to and support for additional education opportunities can be tremendous. Targeted infrastructure development by HPOP will help promote needed change and may inform policy and practice changes that will the benefit of this very vulnerable group of young people.

Prior to New Hampshire issuing the RFP for this capacity building work, input was solicited from the Division for Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) division director and the State's Independent Living manager, to ensure this effort was supportive of their goals to improve transition services for youth in care.

Fedcap Rehabilitation Services, Inc. (Fedcap), responded to the RFP and also had engaged the DCYF division director prior to submitting their proposal. Although Fedcap is a workforce development agency based in New York City, the CEO and numerous staff have strong ties to New Hampshire and know the child welfare and juvenile justice systems extremely well. Fedcap was awarded the contract to partner with OMHRA, HPOP, and New Hampshire's DCYF to create the conditions for system change. (The contract required Fedcap partner with OMHRA/HPOP staff to implement the project.) The project was managed as a team, attending meetings with DCYF, assisting with development of marketing materials, and identifying speakers for a symposium.

This effort targets multiple levels for intervention. Changes to policy, training curricula, and other institutional practices are a necessary step, but are not sufficient by

themselves. A common problem in efforts such as these is that project goals—in this case helping youth who have been in the State system become inspired about and then supported for going to college—are goals that most people support enthusiastically. However, this support, doesn't always translate to behavioral change on the ground in terms of daily work. The best practices described here (Get Ready, Networking by Design, and Connect 2 Career) can become the context for different types of interaction with youth in the belief that changing behavior will contribute to changing minds. Providing concrete, packaged, and action-oriented strategies like these are a critical step in promoting the necessary cultural and behavioral changes that must happen if to change the story for these youth.

- All provider regulations, policies, and training curricula for DCYF staff, residential providers, and foster parents, have been reviewed with the goal of strengthening them to emphasize self-sufficiency, specifically through strategies to encourage youth to plan for and attend post-secondary education.
- A memorandum of understanding with the New Hampshire Community College system is in progress to spell out the college's commitment to work in partnership with DCYF to identify students as they enter school, provide them with visible support services, and implement other strategies to ensure their success.
- The Connect 2 Career how-to manual guides the development and implementation of a process for youth, beginning as early as 9th grade, to explore a range of career opportunities. The Connect 2 Career event brings together employers and representatives of healthcare occupations as panel members to create a forum for youth to meet with professionals, learn about various healthcare occupations, and interact with panel members in a professional manner in speed-dating style. In many child welfare systems, children in care rarely have access to this type of experience. Connect 2 Career, along with Network by Design (see below), are intended to provide participants) throughout their high school years, opportunities to create a portfolio of interests and make connections that build social capital.
- Through Networking by Design, a networking event located in a business setting, youth in care have an opportunity to practice their networking skills directly with community stakeholders and build meaningful relationships with community leaders. A secondary, but very important, potential outcome of Connect 2 Career and Networking by Design is the simultaneous creation of opportunity for community leaders to nurture the hopes and dreams of our communities' most vulnerable citizens and to change the trajectory of their futures.
- Personal Branding is a marketing agency approach to reframe one's experiences of adversity into marketable positions of strength. This strategy has been incorporated into Fedcap's Get Ready program and is highlighted especially for youth in care. The project culminated in a symposium, held on September 27, which brought together DCYF case workers, colleges and universities, business leaders, legislators, providers and numerous other community members and

agencies. The event featured a panel of young adults from the child welfare system who had achieved higher education. One speaker is an HPOP participant and a recent graduate of a Licensed Nursing Assistant (LNA) program.

The products described above were developed by Fedcap and are now available to OMHRA. OMHRA plans to offer Connect 2 Career and other events over the course of the next year as part of their case management and training work.